CLAIMS

1 1. A method of sending a video segment over a computer network, comprising:

2 (a) acquiring a video segment;

3 (b) accepting an indication of an intent to send the video segment over the computer

4 network; and

5 (c) in response to the indication accepted in step (b), automatically

6 (i) assuring that the video segment is in a streaming video format;

7 (ii) creating an identifier for the video segment; and

8 (iii) sending the video segment and the identifier over the computer network to

9 the receiving computer.

1 2. The method of claim 1 wherein step (c)(i) comprises:

2 (c1) determining if a format of the video segment is compatible with a streaming video

3 format;

4 (c2) if the result of the determination performed in step (d1) is negative, converting the

5 video segment to a temporary, uncompressed video segment in a format that is

6 compatible with a streaming video format; and

7 (c3) converting the video segment present after the conclusion of steps (d1) and (d2)

8 into a streaming multimedia format; and

9 wherein step (c)(ii) comprises:

10 (c4) creating and storing temporarily a still image characteristic of the video segment

11 in streaming multimedia format, the still image being encoded in a format suitable for

12 display as a single invariant frame; and

13 wherein step (c)(iii) comprises:

14   (c5)   transferring over the computer network to the receiving computer the temporarily

15   stored video segment in streaming multimedia format together with the temporarily stored

16   still image.

1   3.   The method of claim 1 further comprising storing temporarily the video segment in

2   streaming multimedia format prior to its transfer over the computer network.

1   4.   The method of claim 1 further comprising storing the transferred video segment and the

2   still image in a storage medium under the control of the receiving computer.

1   5.   The method of claim 3 further comprising deleting the temporarily stored video segment

2   and the temporarily stored still image from the temporary storage location, thereby

3   freeing the temporary storage location for reuse.

6.   The method of claim 1 further comprising requesting a sender of the video segment to

2   select a method of distribution of the video segment to a viewer.

1   7.   The method of claim 1 wherein the video segment comprises an image portion and an

2   audio portion.

1   8.   The method of claim 1 further comprising, after step (a) and before step (c), the step of

2   compressing the video segment.

1   9.   The method of claim 1 wherein step (c) further comprises sending with the video segment

2   one or more indicia selected from the group consisting of an identifier of the sender of the

3   file, an access privilege associated with the file, information indicative of a time period

4   during which the file will be accessible, and information indicative of a number of

5   instances that the file may be accessed.

1   10.   A method of distributing a video segment over a computer network, comprising

2   (a) acquiring a video segment;

3   (b) accepting an indication of an intent to send the video segment over the computer

4   network;

5   (c) in response to the indication accepted in step (b), automatically

6   (i)   assuring that the video segment is in a streaming video format;

7   (ii)   creating an identifier for the video segment; and

8   (iii)   sending the video segment and the identifier over the computer network to

9   the receiving computer; and

10   (d) distributing the video segment over the computer network to a viewer for display as a

11   streaming video segment.

11.   The method of claim 10 wherein the step of distributing the video segment comprises

transmitting link information that a viewer can employ to request the transmission of a

specific video segment for display as a streaming video segment.

12.   The method of claim 10 wherein the step of distributing the video segment comprises

transmitting the video segment for display as a streaming video segment as a consequence

3   of being sent a link in an e-mail.

1   13.   The method of claim 10 wherein the step of distributing the video segment comprises

2   transmitting the video segment embedded in a web page for display as a streaming video

3   segment.

1   14.   The method of claim 10 wherein the step of distributing the video segment comprises

2   distributing the video segment in accordance with an outcome of a test selected from the

3   group of tests consisting of checking an identity of the transmitter of the video segment,

4 checking an access privilege associated with the video segment, checking whether a time

5 of transmission conforms to a time period during which the video segment may be

6 accessed and checking whether a number of instances that the video segment may be

7 accessed has been reached.

1 15. A system for sending a video over a computer network , comprising:

2 (a) a first computer adapted to be connected to other computers over a computer network,

3 the first computer having operating on it;

4 (1) a first module for acquiring a video segment;

5 (2) a second module for generating an identifier associated with the video segment;

6 (3) a third module for accepting an indication of intent to send the video segment to

7 another computer;

8 (4) a fourth module for automatically assuring that the video segment is in a

9 streaming video format; and

10 (5) a fifth module for automatically sending the video segment and the identifier over

11 the computer network to the receiving computer; and

12 (b) a second computer comprising a central repository, the second computer adapted to be

13 connected to other computers over the computer network, the second computer

14 having operating on it:

15 (6) a sixth module for automatically receiving the video segment and its associated

16 identifier sent by the first computer over the computer network; and

17 (7) a seventh module for storing the video segment and associated identifier in the

18 central repository;

19   whereby the video segment and its associated identifier are transferred to and stored in the

20   centralized repository.

1   16.   The system of claim 15 wherein the first module comprises an apparatus selected from

2   the group consisting of a video camera, a computer adapted to produce digital video

3   segments, and a video machine capable of accessing a preexisting video.

1   17.   The system of claim 15 wherein the first module is adapted to provide a video segment

2   comprising an image portion and an audio portion.

1   18.   The system of claim 15, further comprising a module adapted to compress the video

2   segment into a machine-readable file smaller than the video segment.

1   19.   The system of claim 15 wherein the central repository is adapted to record one or more

2   indicia selected from the group consisting of an identifier of the transmitter of the video

3   segment, information indicating a storage location of the video segment, an access

4   privilege associated with the video segment, a time period during which the video

5   segment is accessible and information indicative of a number of instances that the video

6   segment may be accessed.

1   20.   The system of claim 15, further comprising a module adapted to distribute the video

2   segment over the computer network for display as a streaming video segment.

1   21.   The system of claim 20 wherein the module adapted to distribute the video segment is

2   adapted to distribute link information that a viewer can employ to request the

3   transmission over the computer network of a specific video segment for display as a

4   streaming video segment.

1 22. The system of claim 20 wherein the module adapted to distribute the video segment is

2 adapted to distribute a link to the video segment in an e-mail for display of the video

3 segment as a streaming video segment.

1 23. The system of claim 20 wherein the module adapted to distribute the video segment is

2 adapted to distribute the video segment embedded in a web page for display as a

3 streaming video segment.

1 24. A computer program recorded on a machine-readable medium, comprising:

2 (a) a module adapted to acquire a video segment;

3 (b) a module adapted to acquire an indication of intent to send the video segment over a

4 computer network;

5 (c) a module adapted to automatically generate an identifier for the video segment; and

6 (d) a module adapted to automatically transfer the video segment and its associated

7 identifier as a machine-readable file over the computer network;

8 whereby the video segment and its associated identifier are created, associated and

9 transmitted over a computer network to a central repository for recording in the

0 repository, the transfer occurring in response to the indication of intent.

1 25. The computer program of claim 24, further comprising a module adapted to automatically

2 compress the video segment.

1 26. The computer program of claim 24, further comprising a module adapted to automatically

2 decompress a video segment selected from the set of video segments recorded in the

3 computerized central repository, the video segment having been received over the

4 computer network from the central repository.

1 27. A computer program recorded on a machine-readable medium, comprising:

2   (a) a module adapted to receive a video segment, the video segment having been

3   transmitted over the computer network in association with an identifier;

4   (b) a module adapted to store in a central repository the video segment as a machine-

5   readable file;

6   (c) a module adapted to record in the central repository the machine-readable identifier of

7   the video segment;

8   (d) a module adapted to transmit over the computer network the identifier of the video

9   segment recorded in the computerized central repository; and

10   (e) a module adapted to transmit over the computer network the video segment recorded

11   as a machine-readable file in the computerized central repository;

12   whereby the video segment is capable of being displayed as a streaming video segment.

1   28.   The computer program of claim 27 wherein module (c) comprises a module adapted to

2   record one or more indicia selected from the group consisting of an identifier of the

3   transmitter of the video segment, a storage location of the video segment, an access

4   privileges associated with the video segment, a time period during which the video

5   segment will be accessible and information indicative of a number of instances that the

6   video segment may be accessed.

1   29. A method for sharing video images comprising:

2   a) uploading a video image to a video server;

3   b) tagging said video image with an identification tag;

4   c) supplying said identification tag to an addressee; and

5   d) serving said video image to said addressee.

1   30. A method for sharing video images comprising:

2   a) receiving a video image identifier generated by a video sender, wherein said video

3   sender uploads said identified video image to a server;

4   b) using said video image identifier to request said identified video image from said

5   server; and

6   c) accepting delivery of said identified video image.